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## NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS.

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Correspondents are respectfully requested to write on one side of the paper only.

## The Daily Press

HONGKONG, OCTOBER 20th, 1878.

In the *Peking Gazette* of the 28th ultimo is published an interesting memorial from the Acting Viceroy of Nanking, which regards the lekin tax. It has apparently been proposed to re-open certain inland Customs Houses in the province of Kiangnan, and orders have actually been issued to this effect at the instance of the Board of Revenue. But the Viceroy objects that it would be virtually impossible to raise further Customs taxes in addition to the lekin, which is already more than sufficiently oppressive. He admits that if the Customs duties could be levied as well as the lekin it would be highly advantageous from a revenue point of view, but the mercantile classes, groaning under the burden of the lekin tax now prevailing, are not a day without longing for measures for its reduction. Since the Viceroy's accession to office, which was only a few months ago, he has, he says, received multitudes of petitions from the mercantile community, and despite his attempts at persuasion, they continue to besiege him unintermittingly with their appeals. It is rather a novel thing to find a Chinese official urging the influence of public opinion in support of his plea. But the memorialist does not hesitate to bring forward his testimony in support of what he advances. "Public opinion," he says, "would certainly be dissatisfied were it now proposed to re-impose the inland Customs duties over and above the lekin taxation at present in force."

And well it might be. What with taxing and "squeezing" the long-suffering native is frequently robbed of nearly the entire fruits of his industry. He never knows when he has done paying, is never certain when the last toll has been wrung from him. This greedy policy of the Chinese Government is most ill-advised and short-sighted. As the Viceroy of Nanking remarks in speaking of the attempt to impose these additional Customs taxes, even though the scheme were, by a great effort, carried into execution, it would merely result "in draining the pond to take a haul of fish"—in other words, killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. And, as he points out, this would seriously curtail the recovery of the prosperity of the country. The folly of overweighing trade with grievous and intolerable taxation ought to be apparent to any Government. Not only does it tend to diminish trade and thus decrease the revenue, but it engenders a spirit of discontent among the people—a feeling that they are unfairly treated. The mercantile classes in China, it is notorious, driven to self-protection to make use of all kinds of devices to evade some of the numerous imposts levied upon their goods. The Viceroy is, naturally enough, in favour of the re-imposition of the inland Customs duties in their place, and urges in support of this that a larger revenue is derived from the former than could be obtained from the latter. Doubtless he has good reasons for his argument, but whatever they are, and however disposed he may be to put the maximum revenue out of the people, it is greatly to his credit that he has the common sense to perceive that, beyond a certain limit, taxation is not only grindingly oppressive but is positively destructive of the source from whence it is derived.

Those people who have pinned their faith to Captain Lumsden's sleeve, and awaited the wild romance of which he is the author, will be somewhat disappointed on perusing the report of Mr. Macleay's Expedition to New Guinea. Nor will those who have been fondly cherishing dreams of a new El Dorado be much better pleased, since Mr. Macleay found no signs of auriferous wealth during the course of his investigations. But as he failed to do more than examine the coasts and in no case ventured any distance inland, his information is necessarily somewhat limited. All that he has seen in New Guinea, however, inclines Mr. Macleay to believe that the island will never prove suitable for colonisation by Europeans. The soil is indeed wonderfully fertile, and suitable for the growth of almost any tropical production; the waters turn with pearl shell and tortoise shell; and doubtless pearls are also abundant. But the natives have not been seen in possession of any ornaments made of precious metal, from which he infers that gold does not exist on the island. The Malay inhabitants send industries and peacefully disposed, and Mr. Macleay is of opinion that a thriving trade might be established with them. The island is, unlike Australia, pretty densely populated, and individual possession of the land seems to obtain in the country. The explorer thinks that the natives would be unwilling to work as labourers, and the climate would render it impossible for Europeans to labour there. Of course it would be preposterous to invite Chinese emigration, but it is questionable whether it would be either politic or just to do so. Altogether Mr. Macleay's exploration of New Guinea does not bring to light any fresh inducements for the British Government to annex the island. The facts that its shores command the Torres Straits, rendering it undesirable that any foreign power should establish itself there, and that it may one day offer a field for the exercise of Australian energies, are still the main reasons why England should formally take possession. Perhaps it would be preferable to establish a trading station there for the present, over which the British flag might be hoisted. It would also be desirable that an exploring expedition should be fitted out to visit the unknown interior. Mr. Macleay has established the fact of there being a central chain of lofty mountains, and it is to be hoped that the next explorer will furnish the world with some definite particulars concerning the interior of what is evidently a most fruitful and beautiful island. It is of great importance that accurate knowledge of all hitherto unexplored lands should be obtained. To the honour of Europe it is recorded that no

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And well it might be. What with taxing and "squeezing" the long-suffering native is frequently robbed of nearly the entire fruits of his industry. He never knows when he has done paying, is never certain when the last toll has been wrung from him.

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